# Israeli premier demands German government stop funding Jewish Museum Berlin

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**27 December 2018**

The Israeli government is continuing its ferocious campaign of censorship and repression aimed at anyone who dares criticise its policies.

At a German-Israeli government consultation meeting in early October, ultra-right Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany with a letter calling on her government to stop financial support for the Jewish Museum Berlin. The museum was accused of "anti-Israel activities" because it had sought, among various other activities, to engage in dialogue with Muslims and other religious communities.

The Jewish Museum, opened in 2001 and housed in a spectacular building designed by Jewish Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, documents the centuries of Jewish culture in Germany that the Nazis tried to wipe out. It also organises eyewitness talks with Holocaust survivors, awards prizes for tolerance and civil courage, and seeks to instil a comprehension of the consequences of anti-Semitism and the crimes of the Nazis in its many visitors and countless school classes. It is one of the most popular museums in the German capital and throughout Germany. By the end of 2016 the museum had attracted nearly 11 million visitors.

Netanyahu's letter states: "The Jewish Museum in Berlin, which is not affiliated to the Jewish community, often hosts events and discussions with prominent BDS [the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, which calls for a boycott of Israel until it meets its 'obligations under international law'] representatives." In addition, the museum has been staging an exhibition entitled "Welcome to Jerusalem," which, according to the Israeli government letter, focuses on "the Palestinian narrative."

In addition to the Jewish Museum, the letter attacks about a dozen other organisations and institutions that criticise the policies of the Netanyahu government, reject the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, promote dialogue between Jews and Palestinians, or merely provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians. It calls on the German government to stop providing financial support for these allegedly "anti-Israeli organisations."

They include non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and initiatives such as the German Protestant churches' "Bread for the World" and the Catholic Church's "Misereor" aid agency. "Bread for the World" is accused of promoting initiatives such as the "Coalition of Women for Peace," which also advocates boycott actions against Israel, and supporting B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organisation that seeks to "end the Israeli occupation." Misereor is accused of supporting "Breaking the Silence," a coalition of former soldiers who criticise the violation of human rights in the Palestinian territories.

The Berlin Film Festival and the Left Party's Rosa Luxemburg Foundation are also accused of "anti-Jewish activities." The document goes on to condemn the magazine +972 published by the Green Party's Heinrich Böll Foundation for allegedly opposing Israeli interests, citing writers for the magazine who have "regularly" accused Israel of apartheid. Also listed in the letter are funding programs of the German Foreign Office and Ministry of Development.

The letter calls for the federal government to "review its funding guidelines." The "German support of NGOs that interfere in the internal affairs of Israel or promote anti-Israel activities," is unique. "We call upon the German government to tie its financial support to a complete halt to such activities."

The 7-page letter to the German Chancellery and Development Ministry was made public earlier this month, and various media outlets reported on it. The source of the letter, however, was not initially clear, because it contained neither a sender nor a signature. It has only now emerged that it was personally handed over by Netanyahu.

As has been the case in earlier campaigns against

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opponents of Israeli occupation policy, the letter seeks to connect the organisations mentioned with the BDS movement and denounces them as "anti-Semitic." For example, the Berlin Film Festival is accused of "regularly hosting BDS activists as guests."

The BDS campaign, which is supported by numerous artists and cultural workers, opposes the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and supports the rights of the Palestinians. It calls for a boycott of the economic, cultural and academic activities of Israel and Israeli citizens, following the precedent set against the South African apartheid regime.

Opposition to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is not anti-Semitism. Rather, it is the Netanyahu government in its struggle against the Palestinian population and the Israeli working class that relies on extreme right-wing forces—entirely in the tradition of anti-Semitism.

The WSWS recently published a comment noting that Israel has become a site of pilgrimage for far-right politicians from around the world. This is so obvious that some Israeli media have referred to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial as a "washing machine" where right-wing extremists can cleanse themselves of charges of anti-Semitism. Ultra right-wing politicians who have recently received a red carpet welcome at the memorial include Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán and his Austrian colleague Sebastian Kurz.

The WSWS explained that the alliance between the Israeli state and the extreme right is not only driven by foreign policy interests: "There is a natural ideological and political affinity that stems from both Israel's present day political and social policies as well as the historical roots of Zionism." The extreme right admire "the Zionist state for its racist policies and its determination to build an ethno-centrist society by means of the apartheid style oppression of the Palestinian people." They would like to emulate "the passage last July of the so-called 'National State Law,' enshrining Jewish supremacy as the legal foundation of the state….with their own xenophobic and racialist laws."

This affinity between the extreme right and Netanyahu's government has been underlined by the reaction to the Israeli letter. It has been enthusiastically greeted by the xenophobic, far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which sits in the German parliament.

In a guest commentary for the national-conservative Israeli media network Arutz Sheva, Petr Bystron, the AfD's chairman in the Bundestag's foreign affairs committee, warned against anti-Israeli lobby groups that had allegedly infiltrated senior German government circles. They were spreading one-sided reports of human rights abuses, according to Bystron, to slander Israel as "racist" and as an "apartheid state."

Bystron claimed the AfD was the only party in Germany that opposed the supposed importation of anti-Semitism and Islamist terrorism via uncontrolled mass immigration from the Middle East. In addition, the AfD planned, he claimed, to expose the flow of money from Berlin and Brussels to the well-connected "anti-Israel" lobby.

In fact, the very same Bystron recently took part in a trip to South Africa to participate in exercises carried out by the "Suidlanders," a right-wing, white "survivalist" group preparing for a "race war" against the country's majority black population. One can easily anticipate that Bystron and AfD party leader Alexander Gauland may also soon be on the Yad Vashem invitation list.

Netanyahu's attempt to squeeze off funding for the Jewish Museum plays into the hands of the far right in Germany. Memorials and museums recalling the Holocaust and Nazi crimes have always been a thorn in the side of right-wing extremists. Now the Israeli government is attacking an institution that seeks to educate millions about these crimes.

Germany's grand coalition government (Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union and Social Democratic Party) has also proved to be a supporter and patron of the extreme right in this matter. It has declared support for the Zionist state to be part of Germany's raison d'état, even in the face of the most severe human rights violations. It has subscribed to a policy that demonises any criticism of the state of Israel and its government as "anti-Semitism."

The German coalition government has made no criticism of Israel's new racist national state law, which establishes Jewish hegemony as the legal basis of the state of Israel and officially turns Palestinians into second-class citizens. It was this silence that apparently encouraged the Israeli government to send its outrageous letter.

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